



## Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Kentucky Wild Rivers Program Adds Nearly 1,000 Acres to Inventory of Protected Lands**

***Purchase will help preserve Little South Fork of the Cumberland River***

**Frankfort, Ky.** (Jan. 13, 2012) – Energy and Environment Secretary Len Peters today announced the purchase of 998 contiguous acres in Wayne and McCreary counties to help protect the exceptional quality and aesthetic character of the Cumberland River's Little South Fork, a portion of which is designated a Kentucky Wild River.

"The acquisition of this land will help protect an exquisite natural environment while providing a beautiful recreation area for Kentuckians and visitors to our state," said Sec. Peters.

The \$1.77 million purchase of the land, known as the Burnett property, was made possible through an award from the Heritage Land Conservation Fund, which is funded from the sale of nature license plates and the collection of unmined mineral taxes and environmental fines.

These funds may be used to purchase natural areas with rare habitats and endangered species; areas important to migratory birds; areas that perform important natural functions that are subject to alteration or loss; and areas to be preserved in their natural state for public use, outdoor recreation and education.

The Burnett property meets all of these criteria, said Zach Couch, coordinator of the Kentucky Wild Rivers program that is administered by the Kentucky Division of Water.

The Kentucky Wild Rivers Act of 1972 designated segments of nine rivers as Wild Rivers. This designation allows the segments to retain many of their natural attributes and it protects them from unwise use and development. Each Wild River is actually a linear corridor encompassing 2,000 feet of all land on either side of the river.

Some activities within these corridors are strictly prohibited, such as surface mining, clear-cutting of timber and construction of dams or other in-stream disturbances. While existing residential and agricultural use may continue, developments or activities that might impair the river's water quality or natural condition are regulated through a permit system.

When property owners are willing, the state may purchase lands within the corridor or within the watershed of the Wild River to further protect the waterway. These lands are then subject to the restrictions imposed on the Wild Rivers corridor.

The promise of land restrictions was the compelling selling factor for the former owners, Karen Burnett and her late husband, John.

"Mrs. Burnett put her property up for sale with the condition that it not be parceled or developed," said Couch. "Through this program, she was able to sell the property to the Commonwealth of Kentucky at fair market value with the assurance that it would remain intact and in its natural state."

Couch said the Burnett tract is an "extraordinary" piece of property. The landscape is varied, with evergreen and deciduous forests, grasslands and a 600-foot-high sandstone-capped knob known locally as the Pilot.

The property also includes nearly 2.5 miles of frontage on the Little South Fork Wild Rivers corridor, which is known to contain a diverse assemblage of mussels and fish. One of these fish is the palezone shiner (*Notropis albizonatus*), which is listed as a federally endangered species.

"This is the best stream worldwide for the population of palezone shiner," said Couch. "The presence of the species in this stretch of river is indicative of the health of the water and the importance of protecting the watershed surrounding it."

The palezone shiner lives in flowing streams with clear, clean water and rocky, sandy bottoms. The only other known extant population is in the Paint Rock River in Jackson County, Alabama. Threats to the species include removal of vegetated streamside buffers and consequent warmer water temperatures, channelization, siltation, deforestation and pesticide runoff.

Couch said the land-use restrictions will help prevent these conditions from occurring.

"Any time you can control what activities occur in a watershed, you can control the biological, botanical and recreational values of that waterway," said Couch.

Couch said plans are underway for performing a complete environmental inventory of the property, restoring the grasslands to forest and establishing hiking trails. It is expected to be open to the public later this year.

For more information about the Kentucky Wild Rivers program, call Allison Fleck at 502-564-3410. For information about the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund, call Zeb Weese at 502-573-3080.

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